

First Fil-Am in the PBA and First Filipino Principal in Artesia, Ricardo Brown

The Quick Brown Fox

by JOSEPH PIMENTEL / AJPress



HE'S considered one of the greatest players to ever suit up in a Philippine Basketball Association (PBA) uniform.

Ricardo Brown, better known as Ricky Brown, will become the first Fil-Am inducted to the PBA Hall of Fame in October but his legacy does not end on the hardwood floor.

Brown's days of leading a basketball team to a championship may be long gone but these days, he has a much larger team counting on him.

As the first Filipino principal in the Artesia school district, Brown leads about 700 students and staff at Faye Ross Middle School in Artesia. Ross Middle School is a highly distinguished magnet school of creative media and arts about 20 miles South East of Los Angeles.

Just like his days on the PBA hardwood, Brown is a perfectionist and he's brought along what he learned on the basketball court to his administration job.

"This [being a principal] is a more pressure packed job - you're dealing with kids, parents, teachers, the community, district officials, being measured by the state and federal government with testing," said Brown to the Asian Journal. "In this profession, you have to embrace collaboration and teamwork. On a basketball team, you can't be successful unless you are able to come together as a team. I have such a wonderful and dedicated staff here at Ross Middle School. It's like a basketball coach. When you have players willing to go through a brick wall to win that's this staff here."

A PBA Legend
For about eight years, Brown played the point guard position in the PBA and his basketball prowess earned him the nickname "Quick Brown Fox" for his ability to run circles around defenders and create basket opportunities for his teammates.

Brown became the first Fil-Am to play in the PBA in the early 1980's.

After graduating from Pepperdine, he was drafted by the Houston Rockets in the third round of

the 1979 NBA draft but was later released to the then San Diego Clippers.

Unable to make an NBA team, he was recruited by Ambassador Eduardo Cojuangco to play for the Philippine national team. In 1981, Brown was part of the team that captured the Jones Cup.

It was the start of his basketball career in the Philippines.

He stayed in the Philippines and played for La Salle in 1982. He entered the 1983 PBA draft where Great Taste Coffee Makers would choose him in the first round.

Brown would win the rookie of the year award in his first season and it was a sign of things to come from the quick brown fox. In his eight seasons in the PBA, he led his team to six titles and led the league in scoring twice. According to Philstar, Brown still holds the PBA records for locals in career scoring average (23.1) and free throw percentage (.876).

He also set the PBA record for the most points scored by a Filipino in a single Finals game scoring 48 points.

The 1985 season was his greatest year, he said. That year he captured the league MVP and led the Great Taste Coffeemakers to a grand slam championship.

"I was on the peak of my game - mentally and physically," he said. "We had such great young players and developed into a great dynamic team."

Little is known that after that season, former Lakers General Manager Jerry West offered Brown a tryout with the Los Angeles Lakers.

West loved Brown's playing style at Pepperdine and wanted to see if he fit in Pat Riley's system.

"I know it would have been a great opportunity for me but I declined it," said Brown.

The reason - he fell in love with the Philippines.

For Brown playing in the Philippines was significant in more ways than one. It wasn't just about basketball. It was about reconnecting with unknown roots.

Born in Chicago, Illinois to an American and a Filipina, Brown only knew of his Filipino heritage from his mother.

Brown's mother always made sure her son would know his Filipino half but he never had a chance to visit the Philippines or his relatives there.

"You have to understand that it was really special for me just to go to the Philippines and see my mother's homeland, to meet my grand-

parents for the first time," said Brown.

"I have a lot of family there who I was in contact with through the years but I never had the opportunity to go there. That in itself was something very special."

"Then I just fell in love with the Philippines," he added. "I fell in love with the Filipino people, the lifestyle, just everything about it. I didn't want to leave."

Injuries forced Brown to retire at the age of 34.

After his PBA career, he settled in Los Angeles where he received his teaching credentials at his alma mater Pepperdine University before earning a Masters degree in educational administration at California State University, Fullerton.

He served as a vice principal at a school in Laguna Hills before accepting the principal position at Faye Ross last year.

Regrets

Despite having a stellar PBA career, Brown admits he has one regret.

As he reflects on his days as a player, he wishes he could have done more for the Filipino people.

"If I had a chance to re-do this I would really connect with the schools," said Brown. "My emphasis would be on education because there's not going to be many kids out there who can make it to the PBA. I would make sure to tell them to go to school everyday and take your education seriously and that while I appreciated some kids looking up at me as their hero, I would tell them that their real hero is their mom and dad."

"I had a forum because of my popularity where people would listen and that's the piece I regret. I could have made a world of difference."

Despite Brown's hindsight of not contributing enough to the Filipino people during his playing days, the 51-year-old is making a difference now.

Principal Brown is making a world of difference about the importance of education to the countless number of kids at Faye Ross Middle School. ■



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